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SIPDIS

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PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

The Jerusalem Post quoted a senior Israeli diplomatic official as saying that Israel will find ways to block the flow of Iranian money into the West Bank if Tehran delivers on its promise to give a Hamas-led PA USD 250 million. He was responding to a report that appeared in the London-based Al-Hayat newspaper that Iran would allocate USD 250 million to the PA to replace the funding withheld by Israel and the US. Ha'aretz printed an AP dispatch quoting Musa Abu Marzouk, deputy head of Hamas's political bureau, as dismissing the report about such a specific pledge by Iran. Yediot quoted Ali Larijani, the head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, as saying in an interview with TIME that should Israel attack Iran's nuclear installations, Tehran's retaliation would not be "a pleasant one." Larijani was also quoted as saying that Iran will consider talks with the U.S. to address concerns that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons, but only if "Mr. Bush does not harangue us." Yediot also quoted former Iranian President Mohammed Khatami as saying in an interview with the Iranian news agency that the Holocaust is a "historical fact."

Yediot prominently cited a travel warning for Israel issued this week by the State Department: "Violent confrontation between organized criminal elements has led to the death and injury of innocent bystanders in incidents throughout Israel, including an October 26, 2005 incident in which a bomb destroyed a Tel Aviv apartment building, killing three people and wounding five. Such incidents in the past have involved the use of bombs, grenades, anti-tank missiles, and small arms fire, and have taken place in Tel Aviv, Caesarea, Ramle, Acre, Hadera, Arad, and the Galilee."

Israel Radio cited the London-based Al-Quds Al-Arabi as saying that the US is interested in the new Palestinian government being formed only after the Israeli elections. The radio cited the Arabic-language newspaper as saying that A/S David Welch asked Abbas to postpone the announcement he will make about the new government. Israel Radio reported that Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman will soon come to Israel. The radio said that Egypt recommends that Israel not rule out contacts with Hamas completely and that it wait to decide how to deal with Hamas, once it has a better impression of whether Hamas will abide by Israel's demands.

Leading media reported that the PA has rejected an Israeli offer to use the Kerem Shalom crossing in the southern Gaza Strip for the passage of goods while the Karni crossing is closed, because of fear that a temporary agreement might continue indefinitely. The Jerusalem Post quoted chief PA negotiator Saeb Erekat as saying in an interview with the newspaper: "We are worried that this will become permanent. I really urge

the Israelis to stick to the agreement."

Electronic media reported this morning that an Israeli was shot to death near the West Bank settlement of Migdalim. All media reported that on Tuesday afternoon, a man from the settlement town of Kiryat Arba was moderately injured and a teenage girl from the settlement of Tekoa was lightly wounded in a stabbing incident at the Gush Etzion junction. Soldiers shot and mortally wounded the stabber before he could attack others. Ha'aretz reported that the IDF is predicting the return of the "stone Intifada" to the West Bank, similar to the situation in 1987-1989.

Leading electronic media reported this morning that a Qassam rocket landed south of Ashkelon, and that the IDF responded with artillery fire. The Jerusalem Post quoted a senior Artillery Corps officer as saying that heavy IDF artillery barrages on unpopulated areas in the northern Gaza Strip may hamper terrorists' movements, but that efforts by the army to avoid harming innocent civilians often means that those firing Qassam rockets are able to escape unharmed.

This morning, Israel Radio and Ha'aretz's web site reported that a senior Islamic Jihad commander was killed in a car explosion in Gaza on Wednesday that witnesses said was caused by an Israeli air strike. The media reported that Palestinian security sources and medics identified him as Abu al-Waleed al-Dahdouh, and that the IDF had no immediate comment.

Ha'aretz quoted Palestinian sources as saying that Hamas and Palestinian PM-designate Ismail Haniyeh are refusing to respond to the written appointment by PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas to form the PA new government.

Major media quoted Acting PM Ehud Olmert as saying on Tuesday, following the high-level meeting he convened on the issue of Israel's relations with Russia, that Russia was an "important country" with which it was necessary to improve relations.

Citing news agency reports, Ha'aretz and Yediot reported that on Tuesday at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, Syria accused Israel of using the Golan as a dumping ground for nuclear waste. The media cited a response from Ambassador Itzhak Levitan, Israel's Permanent Representative to the UN Office in Geneva, that Syrian Representative Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari's speech was full of "repetitive, inaccurate information."

Israel Radio quoted Ambassador John Negroponte, the Director of National Intelligence, as saying that a civil war in Iraq would influence other Middle East countries as well as other places in the world.

All major media, except The Jerusalem Post, led with today's vote at the Likud Central Committee on party chairman Binyamin Netanyahu's proposal that the selection of the Likud's Knesset slate be moved from the central committee to the rank-and-file. Leading media reported that on Tuesday, Netanyahu accused senior Kadima members of attempting to influence Likud Central Committee members to torpedo his proposal. He was quoted as saying in closed talks with central committee members that Kadima was "running an organized campaign" against the move, "including getting senior ministers involved in it." Leading media wrote that by changing his party's voting process, Netanyahu hopes to regain many voters who shifted their preference to Kadima.

Major media (banner in Hatzofe) cited a report that appeared in the Israeli web site News First Class that Olmert was given a USD 320,000 discount on an apartment he bought in a Jerusalem housing project in 2004, in the hope that this would accelerate the granting of construction permits for the entire project. Ha'aretz and other media cited Olmert's office as saying that the contract notes that the seller has the necessary permits and that Olmert was not involved in issuing them.

All media reported that on Tuesday, the Central Elections Committee rejected by a vote of 18-16 requests to disqualify the United Arab List/Arab Movement for Renewal from participating in the upcoming Knesset elections. Kadima MKs voted against the disqualification.

Yediot reported that an IDF major serving in the Arrow anti-missile unit opened a "private bank," investing millions of shekels in the stock exchange on behalf of

his commanding officers, and disappeared. Yediot quoted the IDF Spokeswoman's office as saying that the major was suspended.

All media reported that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and Internal Security Minister Gideon Ezra announced that they would bar the IDF and police from appearing before a special parliamentary investigation committee on the evacuation of the West Bank outpost of Amona last month. Mofaz and Ezra said they would appear on behalf of the army and police before the committee. The media said that both ministers seek to protest the committee's decision to add to its team right-wing politicians who took part in resisting the evacuation. The ministers were quoted as saying that the committee was politically motivated, and formed for the purpose of bashing the government.

Leading media reported that on Tuesday, a resident of the Crown Heights area of Brooklyn was found shot in his car a few blocks from his house. He was a member of the Lubavitch community. The Jerusalem Post and other media reported suspicions that the murder may have been motivated by anti-Semitism. The media reported that anti-Semitism was a possible motive in the murder of a Tashkent rabbi on Saturday.

Mideast:

Summary:

Senior op-ed writer Uzi Benziman commented in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz: "All Israel has to do is declare that it is willing to negotiate for peace with whomever is leading the Palestinians."

Israeli-Arab contributor Hamis Abulafia wrote in popular, pluralist Ma'ariv: "Iran has decided to hand a quarter of a million dollars to the Palestinians. Do we need further proof that boycotting the Palestinians only pushes them into Iran's arms?"

Gidi Grinstein, the president of the Re'ut Institute (www.reut-institute.org), who served on the Israeli delegation to the negotiations with the PLO from 1999 to 2001, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Hamas's mistimed ascendance has made it more vulnerable than ever to an erosion of its power."

Block Quotes:

I. "Ignore Hamas? No Way"

Senior op-ed writer Uzi Benziman commented in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz (March 1): "The outrage among the decision makers in Jerusalem at the results of the election in the Palestinian Authority have them embroiled in internal contradictions, becoming involved in confrontations with the international community, and sending a message of confusion and disorientation to Israeli society. Ehud Olmert should come to his senses.... All Israel has to do is declare that it is willing to negotiate for peace with whomever is leading the Palestinians. If the Hamas wants to come to the negotiating table -- welcome; if it refuses, it will bear the consequences.... It is of course impossible to ignore Hamas's doctrines or the security danger its fundamental approach poses to Israel.... One position is unacceptable: a declaration that Hamas is irrelevant. Those that do not want to dialogue with Hamas should get out of the territories and make the new government in Ramallah and Gaza the exclusive internal problem of the Palestinians."

II. "Pushing Hamas Into Iran's Hands"

Israeli-Arab contributor Hamis Abulafia wrote in popular, pluralist Ma'ariv (March 1): "All sensible people acknowledge that the Palestinian national interest requires getting farther from Iran on one hand, and nearer to those who are quite able to fulfill the Palestinians' dreams by establishing a national home alongside Israel on the other hand -- I am talking about the state to which the Palestinians are connected in all walks of life: water, electricity, funds, etc. At the same time, Israel shouldn't 'reward' Hamas in the form of fund freezing, wall building, and imposing continued closure on the

Palestinians: taking such measures might play in the hands of Hamas.... Iran has decided to hand a quarter of a million dollars to the Palestinians. Do we need further proof that boycotting the Palestinians only pushes them into Iran's arms?"

III. "Don't Let Hamas Escape the Driver's Seat"

Gidi Grinstein, the president of the Re'ut Institute (www.reut-institute.org), who served on the Israeli delegation to the negotiations with the PLO from 1999 to 2001, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (March 1): "For now, security forces and key diplomatic and economic positions remain in the hands of Fatah while Abbas has veto power over any legislation. Hamas needs time to digest the PA and close the gap between its political over-representation and actual weak power.... The key to taking advantage of Hamas's temporary weakness is keeping what New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman calls a 'burning platform' under its political feet. Israel and the world can force Hamas into a set of choices between its ideology and terror infrastructure, on the one hand, and the security and wellbeing of the Palestinian population, on the other. Either Hamas would be forced to moderate, or its power could decline due to tensions between moderates and radicals.... Hamas's mistimed ascendance has made it more vulnerable than ever to an erosion of its power. The advent of the new Palestinian government is a historic opportunity to generate a crisis that may lead to an ideological change in Hamas, the dismantling of its terror infrastructure or at least to a deep division within its ranks. If the West works to keep the 'platform burning,' Hamas's great moment can be turned into a Pyrrhic victory."

JONES